

HYAENA

The secrets of hyaena revealed

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The large carnivore research and conservation work of the Kwando Carnivore Project that is carried out in the Zambezi region (formerly Caprivi region) of Namibia has grown from a study of the demography and ecology of one species - spotted hyaena. I discovered that hyaena numbers, although thought to be abundant throughout Bwabwata National Park and the protected areas of the east



Spotted hyaena are adaptable hunters, and will enter water without hesitation in pursuit of prey, or to cross over water to reach new hunting areas



A hyaena cub peering out at its mother from the den in a termite mound. This photo was taken with an infrared camera placed at the den to monitor the clan structure

SOURCE: KWANDO CARNIVORE PROJECT

trucks that travel through Bwabwata National Park at night and the early hours of the morning to deliver products to countries that lie further north. Trucks are also responsible for the deaths of many sub-adult wild dog that are making a comeback in the region.

It appears that spotted hyaena are making a recovery. A recent survey that we carried out in Bwabwata National Park revealed that clans have recently settled in the multiple-use areas where previously they occurred at very low density. In addition, the survival of adult spotted hyaena in the core conservation areas is good. During the course of 2014 we were able to record individuals from the Kwando Clan (the original study clan from 2009) from a camera trapping exercise which showed every single marked adult was still alive, five years later.

We are in the process of carrying out a camera trapping survey of hyaena and other large carnivores, which we hope will be a useful tool for long-term monitoring. Early results suggest that hyaena appear to be colonising some parts of conservancies outside of protected areas, which strongly suggests a general recovery of habitat and wildlife species in the region. Despite this positive outcome, hyaena continue to have a bad image and remain vulnerable to land-use change and loss of habitat.

The Kwando Carnivore Project is currently carrying out surveys and conservation work on all large carnivore species, and works with the Ministry of Environment, conservancies and other stakeholders in human-carnivore conflict mitigation in the Zambezi and Kavango regions of Namibia.

Zambezi, were far fewer than generally believed.

Through location data from GPS satellite collars, I was able to establish home range size and use, (which varies between 300 and 800km²) and find hyaena dens, where clan size and structure could be established through observation and camera trapping. Clan sizes in the early years of the study were no more than five adults, with only between one and three small cubs in a den at any one time. On one occasion a small cub of the Mudumu Clan had to grow up on his own, being the only cub in the clan during that time.

The study resulted in spotted hyaena being removed from trophy hunting quotas in and around protected areas by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, which has been tremendously supportive of the carnivore conservation work.

Throughout the years of the hyaena study I collected scat to identify their prey choices through analysis of prey remains and hair. Unexpectedly, we found that redbuck made up over half

the diet of spotted hyaena, followed by buffalo calves and lechwe. Impala and kudu, which are abundant in the parks of Zambezi, were not the favoured prey choice. This information was instrumental in understanding home range use of spotted hyaena that live adjacent the Kwando River system, where they feed on floodplain species that are relatively easy to catch.

Most importantly, we discovered that spotted hyaena in the Zambezi region are dependent on trans-boundary movement for long-term persistence. East Zambezi hyaena move into Sioma Ngwezi National Park in Zambia and Bwabwata hyaena regularly spend time in Angola and Botswana. In addition, the east Zambezi hyaena depend on the mosaic of landscapes for their survival, including protected areas, community forests and multiple land-use conservancies which are occupied by people and their livestock.

Currently the biggest threat to spotted hyaena in the Zambezi region of Namibia is vehicle-related mortality, specifically big

CONSERVATION

Marching for elephant

ZI ZT CORRESPONDENT

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On World Animal Day in October, a concerted shout for the preservation of elephant came from the 'elephant capital' of Africa - a small town called Kasane, gateway to Chobe National Park in northern Botswana. Elephants Without Borders staged the event.

Kasane folk are proud of their elephants - the largest concentration in Africa - and having registered in the early morning for the Global March for Elephant and Rhino, they stepped forward in unison towards 'The Seep', a mineral spring that flows into the Chobe River some three kilometres distant.

Leading the way in the March for the survival of their talisman animal were Kelly Landen and Mike Chase, founders of Elephants Without Borders, who focused this year's event on local communities, with particular attention to children, who, as future leaders, will take up the baton for conservation. The willing participation of the younger generation in the March already bodes well.

Conflicts arise, however, when conservation collides with exploitation. The villains are faceless criminals in distant cities who make their fortunes from ivory - supplied



Kasane folk turn out to show their support for their wildlife

by their pawns, the poachers, who heedlessly slaughter elephant in the killing fields of Africa. To eradicate poaching is a massive challenge, but EWB is up for it alongside today's youth.

'Walking the walk' were enthusiastic groups from the local junior secondary and primary schools, accompanied by members of the Botswana Defence Force, the Department of Wildlife and National Parks and DWNP's anti-poaching unit, Botswana's Prison Services and Chobe Brigades - a technical training institution, as well as local businesses and tourist operators, many of whom had also donated towards the festivities and prizes.

Music, dance and song can touch people's hearts, and there was much activity at The Seep, kicked off by uniformed BDF personnel who gave an exhibition of precision marching. The Chobe Arts Group acted, danced and sang. Wearing realistic head masks, they portrayed life in the bush for elephant, lion and buffalo and broadcast warnings of three evils - poaching, litter

and fires - as major dangers to wildlife. Finally, youthful marimba musicians, the Bana ba Ditlou (Children of the Elephants) with their lilting rhythms and irresistible beat, lured locals of all ages into the arena to enjoy some uninhibited dancing.

The raffle draw had the crowd hanging on each result, applauding uproariously the lucky winners of donated game drives, river cruises, meals for two, and even a night at an up-market lodge - many new best friends helping the recipients to collect their vouchers! Furthermore, the gift of a boat cruise into the Park for six children and a teacher from every school to see wild creatures at close quarters in their own environment, underwrote EWB's commitment to youth and the future of our planet.

Inspiring addresses from the MC and District Commissioner, Dr T Mmusi, with closing words from Kasane's Kgosi Mwezi, brought the event to a close. Between now and next year's march it's hoped the spirit of this day, as celebrated similarly throughout the world, will spread.

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